

LEVERAGING PARASPORT EVENTS FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: DEVELOPMENT OF A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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Introduction:

Sporting events have become highly sought after tools for economic, tourism, and social development in cities around the world. While the majority of scholarly focus has been on large-scale events, little research has addressed the potential utility of small-medium scale events. Further, there is a scarcity of research focusing on events of any size and scale for persons with a disability (Misener et al., In press). This research aims to begin to address this gap in the literature by focusing on leveraging tools and tactics of small-medium scale sporting events for persons with a disability. Given that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability states that persons with a disability should have the right to participate on an equal basis in community life including recreational, leisure, and sporting activities (UN, 2009), it is imperative to find ways to ensure these opportunities exist. Hosting sporting events for persons with a disability potentially can offer an opening to tap into scarce resources to create these opportunities (Cashman & Darcy, 2007; Preuss, 2007; Dickson et al., 2012). Recently, Taks et al. (2012) have determined that small-medium scale events are often missing the opportunity to leverage event related resources, and yet communities clearly see the opportunity to leverage events. Parasport events are uniquely positioned to tap into new and existing resources to create enduring infrastructural and social legacies for the local disabled population. While the Paralympic Games has a parallel agenda of social change, it is likely that small-medium scale events offer a more tangible prospect for communities to tap into resources to enhance opportunities for persons with a disability.

Aim of the abstract/paper

The purpose of this paper is to present a framework for leveraging small-medium scale sporting events for increasing community accessibility and opportunities for persons with a disability to participate in sport, recreation, and leisure. Drawing upon data that is part of a broader research project that examines how small-medium scale sporting events have and can be leveraged to enhance accessible sport/physical activity opportunities and general accessibility to benefit local communities, this paper furthers the work of Chalip (2006) and Smith (2009) who argue that in order for benefits to accrue to a host region, host communities need to find points of leverage within the context of event resources to enhance positive social legacies. Further, I integrate these leveraging theory perspectives with the Ontarians for Disabilities Act accessibility standards based in five key areas: 1) *customer service*; 2) *employment*; 3) *information and communications*; 4) *transportation*; and 5) *built environment* (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2005). This emergent leveraging framework shifts the focus of parasport event legacies away from the notion that merely hosting a disability sport event will impact upon communities understanding and relationship with disability sport, and emphasises the need to find points of leverage in the policy frames and discourses of event related processes. Further, it also demonstrates the integration of a public policy perspective as a means of driving the discourse about leverageable assets.

Methodology

In order to examine this area and add insight where there exists a significant gap in the literature, I draw upon data collected through a multiple case study design employing key stakeholder interviews and document analyses. I examine leveraging tactics of four multisport parasport events in Ontario, Canada. The choice of the events is strategic in that I compared the leveraging tactics and strategies for cities that have hosted the events on multiple occasions, and for those cities that have only strategically hosted event on a singular basis with a specifically targeted agenda. These events were financially supported by all three levels of Government with an aim to stimulate economic, community and sport development; and provide host communities with an opportunity to make their communities barrier free, and leave a legacy for persons with a disability in the community (OMHP, 2012).

Results and discussion

This framework offers a means for communities to improve all areas of service accessibility, and may provide sport managers with more concrete ways in which to access resources to create more accessible infrastructure, increase supportive services, and gain access to specialized equipment. Further, this research is a starting point to address Weed and Dowse's (2009) call for empirical evidence of the processes and outcomes of hosting parasport events, and a means to create more effective strategies aimed to create legacies from these events. Given the lack of scholarly attention to disability sport, this serves as an important foundation for beginning the broader examination of the potential of various sizes and scales of parasport events to create durable benefits for the host communities.

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